

HOMAGE TO PICASSO

by

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Nowadays so many names and faces are thrust upon the public that it is difficult to distinguish, one might say, the eagles from the grasshoppers. This is especially true where eagles are rare and grasshoppers are not only plentiful but they are loudly acclaiming their self-importance.

Picasso is an eagle in more senses than one. In this programme I shall try to explain to you why he may be accepted as one of the great artists of our time. Indeed, if we take all his works into account some people would put him as one of the greatest artists ever known to man.

Let us suspend our judgment for a while - at least until we reach the end of this programme.

In the meanwhile let us make a quick sweep of some examples of the kind of paintings and drawings that Picasso created in the seventy years between his youth and old age.

(Follows discussion on film clip of pictures on the wall)

One is struck by the variety, the range of skills and the diversity of subjects. We might ask - what differentiates Picasso from any other artist anywhere or at any time? ~~We might even put it the other way around - what differentiates our own Malaysian artists from Picasso.~~

Why does he deserve a place in the list of men and women who have contributed to the rise of whole civilizations - men and women who have decisively changed some important aspect of Man's condition during their lifetime?

Well, in the first place Picasso enjoyed a rather long life. He was born in 1881 and as you know he died recently at the ripe old age of 92.

To sustain interest in our discussion I will try to avoid being academic or complicated. I will introduce you to Picasso through his works and his ideas. I will not explain the meaning of any of his pictures. Of course I will tell you something about them because they are all very exciting - but I will not try to interpret them. Picasso himself always refused to explain his paintings or sculptures. "There they are and that is ^{that} ~~it~~".

Let us try to form an image of Picasso in our minds.

(Discussion: faces of Picasso . . . there he is as a boy, a young man . . .).

Many of you are probably most familiar with photographs of him taken during the last 20 years or so and that is how you probably have formed a memory image of Picasso.

He was a handsome man and his piercing eyes drew peoples' attention.

He has a magnetic personality and like all great geniuses, ~~he~~ electrified a room whenever he entered it.

his charisma

As I said, he was born in 1881 in Spain. If you are interested in accurate details I could tell you that he was born at 11.15 p.m. on 25th October, 1881 in Malaga which is in the South of Spain about 100 miles East of Gibraltar. His father taught painting and was once a curator of an art museum. ⁹ His mother said that the first sounds Picasso made were piz, piz which was a demand for a pencil. Piz is the short form of lapiz, the spanish word for pencil. Indeed he could draw long before he could speak.

He was a precocious youth. His artistic talents were extraordinary. At 14 he completed in one day, his first day at the school, a test piece for which candidates were allowed one month by the Barcelona School of Fine Arts. Then at 16 in Madrid at the Academy of San Fernando he again completed an assignment ^{what was} normally to be done in several days, in a few hours. He was immediately admitted to the advanced class.

He has left a fairly large collection of his works in the early period which is some times called the "Picasso avant Picasso" (or Picasso before Picasso). Many of these are now in an art museum in Barcelona. These early works show considerable influence of major European artists who were key figures at the turn of the Century. (Pix A). (e.g. Toulouse Lautrec).

Like many a youth of 17 in rural Malaysia today, he found his local surroundings dull and lacking in stimulation. Although he lived the gay bohemian life of young artists and poets in Barcelona, he longed to find the real centre of the art world.

Actually, he hoped to find this centre in England but on his way there, he made a stopover in Paris. And, but for a few short journeys in Europe he remained in France for the remainder of his life.

Therefore, it is convenient to begin our survey of Picasso from the year 1900 which also is the beginning of this Century and he had just turned 19.

We can divide these early years of his creative life in Paris into the Blue period and the Rose period. (Pix on) . . . These are the paintings that many people immediately understand and easily respond to.

The period is called Blue, because he painted in one colour: blue. In the language of Jazz we could say that in this period he felt blue. He was rather poor - often hungry. He had considerable difficulty selling his paintings or getting them exhibited. (More pix - blue).

After the blue period comes the rose period. In this period a rosy haze and pleasant balance of warm colours pervade his pictures. Many of his subjects are circus people and animals. At this time his living conditions had improved and his economic situation became more stable. His pictures are now more sensual.

By 1906 Picasso changes from being a creator of works that awaken our tender feelings by their melancholic or joyful visual messages. He becomes an artist who is concerned with the communication of ideas. He turns from paintings that are more or

Pix

Blue

Rose

Blue

Rose

family + age
(comp. in hr)

M A

M B

M C

less natural reflections of the world we see - a horse that looks like a horse, or a girl that arouses our admiration - to paintings that do not resemble memory images of the world we normally see. These are memory images of the world seen in the mind of the artist. We are now entering the world of abstract art.

Picasso's voyage of discovery into this new world has been given the name Cubism. One of Picasso's strongest claims to our respect as a modern genius, lies in his role as a pioneer in the style of art that is classified as Cubism.

Although ~~there were~~ a number of influences ~~on Picasso~~ ^{Picasso} that led ~~him~~ to Cubism, and although there were other artists who also began to create in the cubist mode, about the same time, most of the serious historians of art and authoritative art critics would agree that Picasso can be regarded as the innovator or the leader of this movement. (Pix LDA).

The advent of Cubism is marked by this picture which was completed in the Spring of 1907. ~~It is a fairly large sized picture being about eight feet square. It has been given the title "L.D.A.", and it now hangs in a museum in New York.~~

Perhaps it will be easier if we prepare ourselves by looking at sketches and similar paintings that were done in the cubist style.

The cubist treatment of the human face was considerably influenced by African art seen in negro masks which were first exhibited in Paris around this time. (Show ^{African} Negro carvings).

Our own Mah Meri masks and Jahut carvings have similar tendencies. (Show Jahut pieces).

Show Pix of 1907 head.

Besides "cubing" faces he also applied the technique to landscapes and still life studies.

Pix: Wine Bottle (see collage of newspaper).

The significance of the Cubist period is best described by Berger. "All modern design, architecture and town planning seems inconceivable without the initial example of cubism. Philosophically cubism is the aesthetic response to the birth of our modern world - radio, cinema, mass production, mass media, new constructional materials, steel, aluminium, plastics; the motor car and the aeroplane.

Cubism changed the relationship between the painted image and reality, and by so doing it expressed a new relationship between man and reality."

Once Picasso's view of the world was captured by cubism, once he felt the urge to break up the images of things then this habit stayed with him for the rest of his life.

However, we should remember two characteristics of his voyage into cubism. Firstly, while he was analysing or taking things apart he was also synthesizing or putting them together again. Hence the art critics speak about analytical cubism and synthetic cubism.

The difference between the two processes is that in synthetic cubism he often put the parts together in ways that were very different from their original arrangements. He also put more colours into his pictures whereas the analytical cubist pictures were in monochrome.

He rearranged the separate parts in new, more exciting ways and according to Picasso himself, in more artistic ways.

He decorated pictures with bits of newspaper, tram tickets and painted in letters of the alphabet.

Although he kept up this habit of analysing and synthesizing, he varied the patterns of analysis and synthesis.

Picasso *important characteristic* *the*
[Secondly,] he never ceased to draw, sculpt or paint in his earlier styles even though he had evolved new modes which were utterly different. (Show sets of contemporaneous contrasts).

A good example of his method of abstraction is seen in this series of drawings he made of a bull.

Here are eight drawings of a bull. In each picture he has eliminated some details ^{yes} but throughout he continues to retain the essence of the bull. Even in the most simplified drawings ^{it is} ~~we are~~ clear that he is depicting a bull.

medium
Indeed he went further and in another ~~context~~ ^{medium} he humourously combined the saddle and handlebars of a bicycle - found in a rubbish dump - into a bull's head. Isn't it a magnificent example of essential simplicity?

IX
I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII

Prx 4
Contrasts set
BULL



LDA.

Let us now return to L.D.A. - the great landmark of cubism. Remember he began to paint this rather large canvass (96" x 92") at the end of 1906 and finished it in 1907. As ~~Cooper~~ says the ^{signature} prime importance of the Demoiselles is the aggressive break that it ^{made} represented with all other painting of the time. As a picture it contains so many experiments that it has also been called a lexicon for the birth of cubism. In this picture there are three ancient influences: Egyptian ^{art} and Negro sculpture and primitive Iberian art.

close up LDA

Look at these three heads. Two on the right and one on the left. Contrast this with the two heads in the centre. The distortions are used to emphasize volume and to convey emotional sensation.

3 M & 3m
(single & female)

If L.D.A. marks the birth of cubism, then the set of two equally large paintings called, "The Three Musicians" mark the point where Picasso brought cubistic innovation to the full ripeness of its maturity.

In 1921, Picasso completed these delightful paintings depicting three musicians. He had become familiar with the characters from his work for the ballet in Italy during World War I. Here he creates a masterpiece of art and poetry. We can easily identify a pierrot, a harlequin and a monk. They are playing musical instruments.

Both the paintings are rather large, (80" x 74" Philadelphia and 80½" x 88½" New York). ~~Seemingly~~ ^F everything is here. But you ^{really} have to see ^{them} it in colour to ~~really~~ appreciate the

beautiful patterns that the various elements coalesce into.

In the Philadelphia picture the three ^{Musicians} are playing a violin, clarinet and accordion while in the New York picture ^{the} pierrot and harlequin are playing a clarinet and a guitar ^{while} the monk is singing.

Personally, I prefer the New York picture. ^{Although} Its composition is a bit more austere and rigorously geometrical, yet it is ^{rather} very expressive. Some people feel it is a little too severe as to be ominous. Certainly, the Philadelphia one has more humour and gaiety. Incidentally, can you see the dog under the bench in the New York version.

Here forms and colours especially in the costumes and the eye masks ^{are} have become signs ^{that are meant} to convey a sense of musical terms.

^{Picasso} The next large work of great significance was created by Picasso in 1937. This is the mural entitled, "Guernica". ^{At this} point we also face an issue that concerns artists and all those who are interested in art from a personal or ^a national point of view. Should artists be committed or to use the French word be engage? Should their art have a message be it political, social or religious, or should their works be ^{or uncommitted} "free". ~~If it is the so-called 'free'~~ ^{in other words} art this often means the picture will probably be something from the mind of the artist. In modern times this can be quite a sick mind or a mind sick of its world. To emphasise the issue: ^{is it sufficient to} should art be for art's sake or should art be created for the sake of society? Should art be socially purposive or ^{is it sufficient to} should it be ^{simply} just a work of art. ^{aesthetic signature}

I am not going to try and argue the pros and cons of such philosophical isms now. ~~This is not the place to do so.~~ My point is that in Guernica and several other works which we will see in a moment, Picasso shows that he is a committed artist - he is for humanity, for peace, happiness and love. He is against wanton destruction of defenceless women, children and animals, especially by the means of aerial bombardment of civilian populations.

Incidentally, we should not forget that Picasso did not suddenly become committed to ~~peace~~ ^{humanity} at the age of 56 when he created Guernica. At 20 he was already concerned with poverty ^{as a child} in his ~~works of the~~ blue period.

Guernica is perhaps one of the most famous committed paintings of the Twentieth Century. In January 1937, Picasso was commissioned by the Spanish Government in exile to create a mural for its pavillion at the World's Fair in Paris. ~~Note the date January 1937.~~

While he was casting around for a suitable theme, Picasso was horrified by ^a the report of large-scale bombing of the ancient Basque town of Guernica in Northern Spain. ^{by the Fascists} The bombing occurred on the afternoon of Monday, 27th April, 1937.

Let me quote from a report in the London Times of the day:

"The tactics of the bombers, which may be of interest to students of the new military science, were as follows: -

First, small parties of aeroplanes threw heavy bombs and hand grenades all over the town, choosing area after area in orderly fashion. Next came fighting machines which swooped low to machine-gun those who ran in panic from dugouts, some of which had already been penetrated by 1,000 lb bombs, which make a hole 25ft deep. Many of these people were killed as they ran. A large herd of sheep being brought in to the market was also wiped out. The object of this move was apparently to drive the population underground again, for next as many as 12 bombers appeared at a time dropping heavy and incendiary bombs upon the ruins. The rhythm of this bombing of an open town was, therefore, a logical one: first, hand grenades and heavy bombs to stampede the population, then machine-gunning to drive them below, next heavy and incendiary bombs to wreck the houses and burn them on top of their victims."

Since this was market day and there were thousands of people from the surrounding farms in the town the consequences were awful.

We can understand the reasons for Picasso's horror at such futile slaughter and his inspiration to enunciate a message to Europe and the world to stop mass slaughtering of innocent people, by carefully studying this picture.

Let us look at the mural which is 11½' x 25' 8".

The main protagonists are four women.

One carrying a dead child and a man lies literally in

pieces at the base of the picture. A horse pierced by a spike screams while a bull impassively views the scene with a brutal look in its eyes. The top centre is dominated by two lamps. Death is by burning, falling and burst explosion. The faces of the two women in the middle are studies in anguish and horror.

The powerful composition concentrates our attention on the moment of greatest anguish, screams of agony and cries of grief.

If you look at a good reproduction or, better still, at the original you will see other interesting symbols like the falling bird or dove and the fire beside the broken sword. It utterly manifests the dreadfulness of modern warfare which involves innocent civilians.

Of course as all of you know none of the national leaders of the time paid any heed to Picasso's message and therefore we are still reading about the futile destruction of women, children and farm animals ^{by aerial bombardment} to this day.

Picasso repeated the message of the evil of war and ~~tried to depict~~ the beauty of peace in a set of murals entitled, "War and Peace" which he created 15 years later. These large murals, 15' 5" x 33' 6" are on two sides of a deconsecrated chappel in Vallauris in the South of France.

This is how the murals are placed. (Show in hands). They are in colour.

WAR

Let us take a look at War. Man defends himself against destruction of plants, food and the burning and trampling of books, and here this devil in the chariot brings germ warfare. He has a sack of skulls on his back. The shadows of a pair of hands on a rock symbolises the disintegration of persons by the atomic bomb, in 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. After the bombing nothing remains except the shadows of persons on the wall.

Peace

And in contrast we see Peace. Here is music and dance; fruitful and creative work, ^{growing plants} planting, making things and writing. Fruits and grain multiply under a benign sun. A little touch of humour - fish in a bird cage and birds in a goldfish bowl. These murals convey clear messages of the gain from peace and the loss to mankind from war. He has made other similar messages. (Pix: Crying Woman 1937 and Poster for Peace). We can only glance at these.

He felt strongly about peace that he called his daughter, borne by Francois Gillot in 1949; Paloma, which means dove in Spanish and symbolize peace.

polome d'any
peace dove

We have just enough time for a quick look at one of Picasso's most enigmatic messages. This is the Unesco mural.

In 1957, Picasso was invited, together with a number of other internationally famous artists to create a mural for the Unesco Headquarters building in Paris.

The main purpose of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation is to contribute towards

world peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world without distinction of race, sex, language or religion by the United Nations Charter.

By the Spring of 1958, Picasso had painted 40 wooden panels covering an area of 120 square yards. The whole mural is mounted in the hall leading to the Conference Rooms. What is Picasso saying? What do these five figures mean?

The images - in a sense Picasso's language is similar to Chinese writing - may be interpreted by those who think they understand Picasso's language. However, like many of the classics several interpretations are quite possible. The master has completely refused to offer any explanations.

It has been suggested that the central figure symbolizes the birth of Icarus. *the son of daedalus in Greek mythology daedalus.*

We may recall that just before this time, in October 1957, the USSR had successfully launched the first man-made satellite - Sputnik - to orbit around the earth.

What do these bathers on the beach represent? What is the female figure running away from?

Is Picasso trying to ^{warn} tell mankind ^{not to be} that like Icarus of Greek mythology - who ^{so father} was provided with a pair of wings made of wax by his father, ^{and to} while escaping from the island where they were ^{to help him}

held prisoner. ^{He} His father warned him not to fly too near the sun. He ignored the warning and the wings melted. He fell into the sea and drowned. ^Q There ^{seems to be} is ~~some~~ moral here about ^{the} misuse of technology which can ultimately lead to the destruction of ~~the~~ ^{human kind} ~~user~~. Or ^{perhaps Picasso} is ~~he~~ reminding us that ~~the end~~, the ultimate end of technological progress - especially flight through the atmosphere is to fall into the sea of infinity.

We do not know the answers because he has not said a word, ^{and} now he is dead.

How shall we sum up his life in our final tribute? I can do no better than give you a quotation from one of his equally famous contemporaries, Gertrude Stein.

"He alone among ^{painters} ~~paintings~~ did not set himself the problem of expressing truth which all the world can see, but the truth which only he can see."

* * * * *

4 June, 1973

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